1978 & 1979 respectively. At present no irrigation project benefitting Bilaspur District is pending clearance at the Centre.

(b) Two projects namely Arpa & Kelo benefitting Bilaspur District have been sent back to the State Government in May. 96 and November. 96 respectively due to non-compliance of the observations of Central Appraising Agencies by the State Government for more than one year.

(c) The State Government is required to submit modified project reports after compliance of the observations and obtain environment/forests/ rehabilitation & resettlement plans clearances. Though there is prescribed time limit for appraisal of the projects, the clearance is delayed due to the delay by the State Governments in complying with the observations of various Central Appraising Agencies.

(d) The details of amounts spent and scheduled date of completion of the ongoing major and medium irrigation projects are as under :

(Rupees in crores)

S. No.	Name of Project	Latest Estimated Cost	Expenditure upto March 1995	Schedule of Completion
1.	Hasdeo Right Bank Canal	13.39	13.39	Completed
2.	Hasdeo Bango	858.31	486.23	Beyond VIII Plan
3.	Ghonga	6.73	6.73	Completed
4.	Bilaspur Diversion	6.30	0.81	Beyond VIII Plan
5.	Arpa	265.71	4.18	Unapproved Project
6.	Kelo	92.45	-	-do-

[English]

Issue of Passports

1325. SHRIMATI BHAVNA BEN DEVRAJ BHAI CHIKHALIA :
SHRI RAMESHWAR PATIDAR :
SHRI SHIVRAJ SINGH :
SHRIMATI SHEELA GAUTAM :

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether there is considerable delay in issuing Passports by the Passport Offices due to lack of sufficient staff and other reasons;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the remedial steps taken/being taken in regard thereto?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL) : (a) and (b). There are a number of factors responsible for delay in issuing passports. Lack of sufficient staff is, however, not a major factor. The principal factors for delay are :

(i) receipt of negative or incomplete police reports by Passport Offices.

(ii) Discrepancies/deficiencies in documents submitted by applicants.

(iii) Lack of response on time from applicants who are asked to submit additional documents.

(c) Remedial measures being undertaken are :

(i) Temporary additional staff is at once provided to passport offices whenever any exceptional increase in pendency is noticed.

(ii) Opening of new Passport Offices in Ghaziabad, Pune, Thane and Vihakhapatnam and Collection Centres at Madurai, Surat, Gurgaon, Vijaywada and Shillong.

(iii) Automatic re-issue of passport for 10 years or 20 years at the option of the applicant without police verification after expiry.

(iv) Expansion of the list of officers authorised to issue Verification Certificates to include General Managers and above in Public Sector Undertakings of the Government of India and officers of the rank of Colonel and above in the Army and their equivalents in the Navy and Air Force.

(v) Acceptance of photocopied passport application forms to eliminate long queues which lead to harassment of applicants.

(vi) Setting up of Passport Advisory Committees.

(vii) Monitoring Cell headed by a Public Relations Officer directly under the charge of Chief Passport Officer set up in CPO Headquarters for speedy redressal of complaints.

Miss World Pageant

1326. PROF. P.J. KURIEN : Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state :

(a) whether there has been a lot of protests against the Miss World Pageant at Bangalore;

(b) if so, the details and reasons therefor; and

(c) the Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI S.R. BOMMAI) : (a) and (b). Yes. Sir. Social activists and women organisations had protested against the Miss World Pageant held at Bangalore on 23rd November, 1996 for a variety of reasons ranging from commodification of women to disparagement of Indian Womanhood.

(c) The Government acknowledges the right of freedom of expression of all sections of society.

Vacant Posts of Ambassadors

1327. SHRI SUSHIL CHANDRA : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) the total number of Indian ambassadors functioning in various countries, category-wise;

(b) the posts of ambassadors which are lying vacant, country-wise and the time by which these posts are likely to be filled up; and

(c) the number of ambassadors who belong to IFS and IAS categories and the number of such ambassadors who have been taken from non-Government sectors and who are not member of any specific Government Service?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL) : (a) As of November, 1996, there are 100 Heads of Mission - 73 Ambassadors and 27 High Commissioners - working in various countries.

(b) At present, eleven posts of Heads of Mission are lying vacant. Of these, six Heads of Mission have already been appointed and are in the process of completing formalities for joining their respective Missions in Cambodia, Cuba, Syria, Vietnam, Yemen and Federal Republic of Yugosiavia. Action is underway to appoint Heads of Mission in Burkina Faso, Croatia, Maldives, Mozambique and North Korea.

(c) Out of 100 Heads of Mission presently functioning in various countries, 91 are career Diplomats belonging to the IFS. The other nine are eminent persons who have been drawn from various fields of public life but at present do not belong to any specific Government Service.

[Translation]

Purchasing of Ships

1328. SHRI K.D. SULTANPURI : Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state :

(a) the name of ports for which orders have been placed for purchasing of ships;

(b) whether any funds have been allocated in this regard;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) the time by which these ships will be ready for passengers and for carrying goods?

THE MINISTER OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI T.G. VENKATRAMAN) : (a) No Major Port has placed orders for purchasing of any ships.

(b) to (d). Do not arise.

Youth Policy

1329. SHRI GANGA CHARAN RAJPUT : Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government propose to announce any Youth Policy like Foreign Policy, Agricultural Policy and Industrial Policy;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the Government propose to take any effective measures to provide jobs to the unemployed youths of the country; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH AFFAIRS AND SPORTS IN THE MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI DHANUSHKODI ATHITHAN R.) : (a) and (b). A National Youth Policy already exists. There is a proposal to re-formulate the Policy with a view to making it more need based.

(c) and (d). The existing Youth Policy, provides the youth with maximum access to education which, in addition to developing their alround personality, imparts appropriate professional and vocational training with a view to enabling them to avail of employment opportunities. Further, the Department of Youth Affairs & Sports have been implementing a number of schemes to impart skill development training to youth.

[English]

Falling of Nutrition Level

1330. KUMARI SUSHILA TIRIYA : Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that nutrition levels in the country are falling at an alarming rate;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether it is also a fact that National Nutritional Council set up by Government has had any meetings;

(d) if so, the details of the meetings and the decisions taken therein; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI S.R. BOMMAI) : (a) and (b). No, Sir. The level of nutrition has actually improved from